MONSTRESS
MARJORIE LIU
ISSUE 21
SANA TAKEDA
WINNER OF FIVE 2018 EISNER AWARDS

MONSTRESS™ ISSUE 21

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THE MONSTRESS STORY SO FAR...

Chaos continues to surround Maika Halfwolf and the ancient Monstrum, Zinn, that lives within her body. When a Cumaean Inquisitrix named Gull opened a rift between the Known World and the realm that houses the rest of the long-imprisoned Monstra, Maika and Zinn had to use all of their combined strength to close the rift, trapping the Monstra once more and averting certain apocalypse.

Amid the devastating aftereffects of that breach, Maika and her ally Corvin set off to find Maika's young friend, Kippa, who had been kidnapped by forces working for a mysterious "doctor". But Maika and Corvin were soon waylaid by Maika's old foe, Yvette Lo Lim, and attacked by a group of red-robed cultists led by a man who claims to be Maika's father.

Meanwhile, the Known World is moving ever closer to open warfare between humans and Arcanics. In preparation, rival factions are beginning to enter uneasy alliances – including the Arcanic Dusk and Dawn Courts and their newlywed representatives, the Baroness and the Warlord.

THE PLAYERS...

MAIKA An Arcanic teen who survived the Great War, and slavery at the hands of the Cumaean witch nuns. Ruthless and haunted, she is determined to uncover the truth behind her mother's murder — and her mother's secrets — in the hope that she can free herself from an ancient and dangerous god called a Monstrum that is imprisoned inside her body and fills her with an otherworldly hunger for human flesh.

ZINN A mysterious, primordial Monstrum of tremendous power that shares Maika's body and mind, and fights her for control. Once considered a god, and drawn into this world by the Shaman-Empress, this Monstrum is driven by a deadly hunger, consuming the lives of humans and Arcanics alike, leaving only their desiccated corpses behind. Though it may give the impression that its only wish is to survive, there's far more to this creature, and its desires, than meets the eye…

KIPPA An Arcanic fox girl saved from slavery by Maika. Innocent and optimistic, she is frightened by the Monstrum — but trusts Maika and will bravely defend her and others by rushing into battles too dangerous for a child.

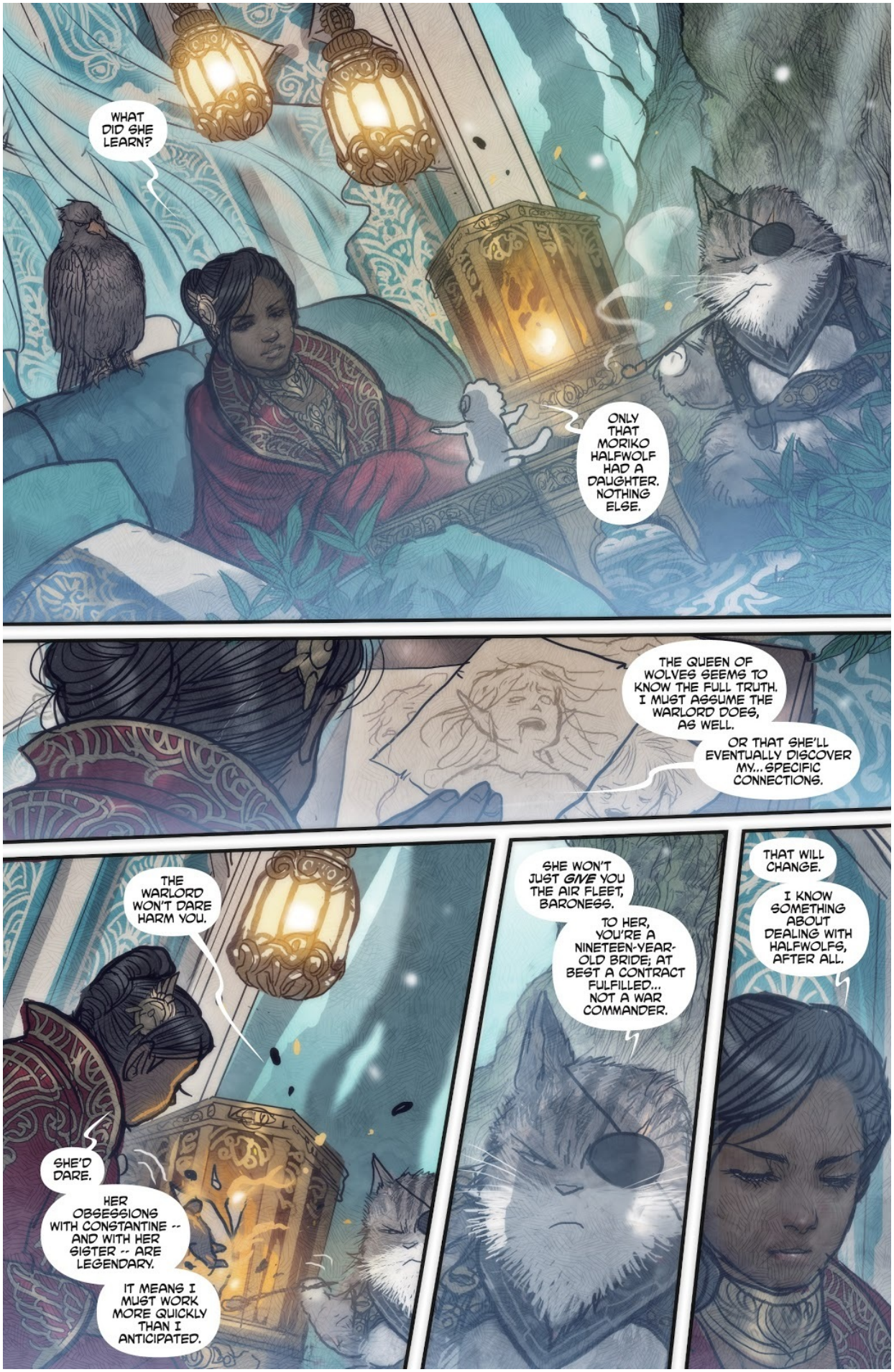
REN An enigmatic nekomancer cat with mysterious motives, he is one of Maika's companions on her journey, and perhaps an agent of the Dusk Court — or some greater power.

TUYA Maika's closest friend in the world, who has been with her since before the Battle of Constantine. Unbeknownst to Maika, she is also the Baroness of the Last Dusk, a high-level member of the Arcanic Dusk Court tasked with containing — or even destroying — Maika's power.

WARLORD The Dawn Court's "Sword of the East," twin sister of Moriko Halfwolf, and Maika's aunt. Ruthless in her ambition, the Warlord's greatest desire is to unravel the mystery behind the destruction of Constantine. She believes the secrets of Constantine will protect the Arcanics in their impending war against the humans -- but she does not realize that the answers she seeks lie within her young niece.

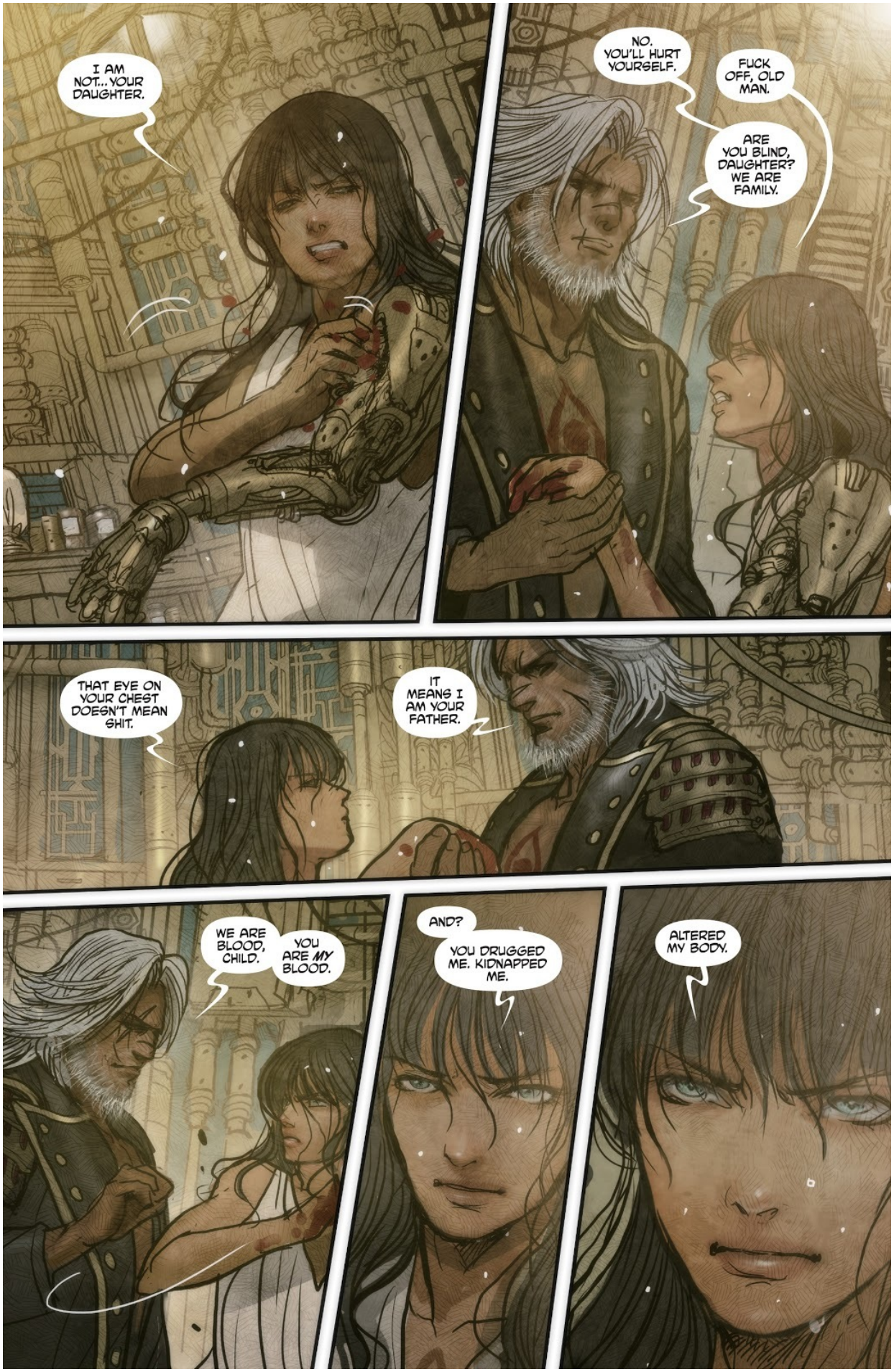
"MY APOLOGIES, BARONESS.
"THE NEED FOR SECRECY MEANT MY INVESTIGATION OF THE MASS GRAVE TOOK FAR LONGER THAN IT SHOULD HAVE.
"THE DEAD WERE ALL IN THEIR EARLY TO LATE TEENS."

"NOTHING IN COMMON EXCEPT THEY WERE FORMER CUMAEAN SLAVES, AND, MORE IMPORTANTLY, SURVIVORS FROM THE HEART OF THE CONSTANTINE BLAST.
"ACCORDING TO OUR SOURCES, THE WARLORD KIDNAPPED THEM BECAUSE SHE THOUGHT THEY MIGHT HAVE INTELLIGENCE ABOUT THE WEAPON THAT DESTROYED THE CITY.
"BUT NONE OF THEM TALKED. EITHER THEY KNEW NOTHING... OR THEY WERE LOYAL TO THE DEATH.
"THE WARLORD HAD THEM KILLED SO THE NEKOMANCERS COULD COMPEL THE TRUTH FROM THEIR SOULS."


WHAT DID SHE LEARN?
ONLY THAT MORIKO HALFWOLF HAD A DAUGHTER. NOTHING ELSE.
THE QUEEN OF WOLVES SEEMS TO KNOW THE FULL TRUTH. I MUST ASSUME THE WARLORD DOES, AS WELL.
OR THAT SHE'LL EVENTUALLY DISCOVER MY... SPECIFIC CONNECTIONS.
THE WARLORD WON'T DARE HARM YOU.
SHE'D DARE.
HER OBSESSIONS WITH CONSTANTINE -- AND WITH HER SISTER -- ARE LEGENDARY.
IT MEANS I MUST WORK MORE QUICKLY THAN I ANTICIPATED.
SHE WON'T JUST *GIVE* YOU THE AIR FLEET, BARONESS.
TO HER, YOU'RE A NINETEEN-YEAR-OLD BRIDE; AT BEST A CONTRACT FULFILLED... NOT A WAR COMMANDER.
THAT WILL CHANGE.
I KNOW SOMETHING ABOUT DEALING WITH HALFWOLFS, AFTER ALL.

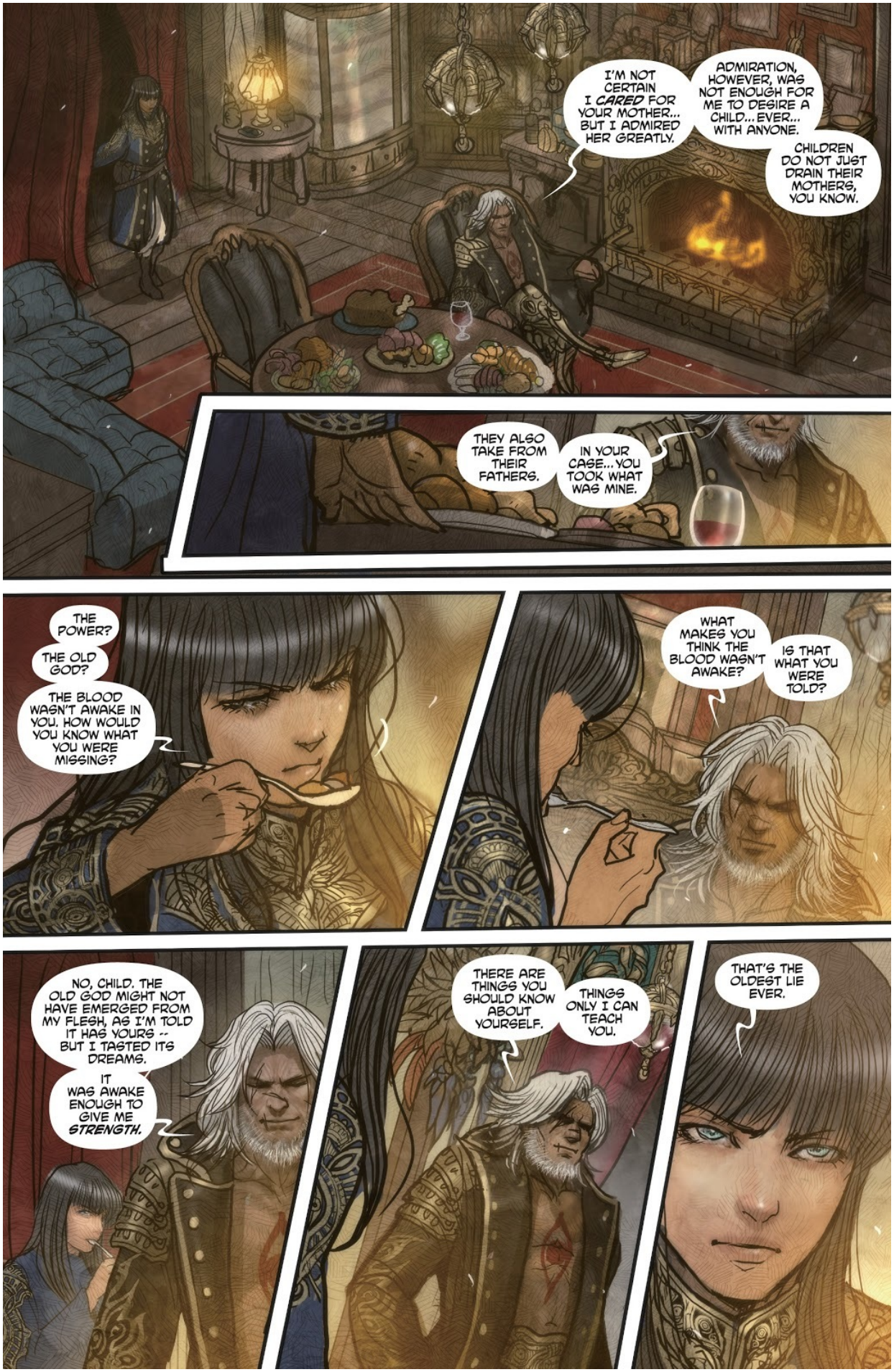
ZINN!
WHERE ARE YOU?!
YOU BASTARD!
I NEED TO TALK WITH YOU!
YOU'RE TOO FAR! I CAN'T UNDERSTAND YOU!
SPIT ON YOU, ZINN...
...WHAT'S THAT SUPPOSED TO MEAN?
BLOOD? BUT --

CHNGG
KR-SHHRNGG
MY DAUGHTER SHOULD LACK FOR NOTHING.
OURS HAS ALWAYS BEEN A PROSPEROUS LINE.
...WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO ME?!

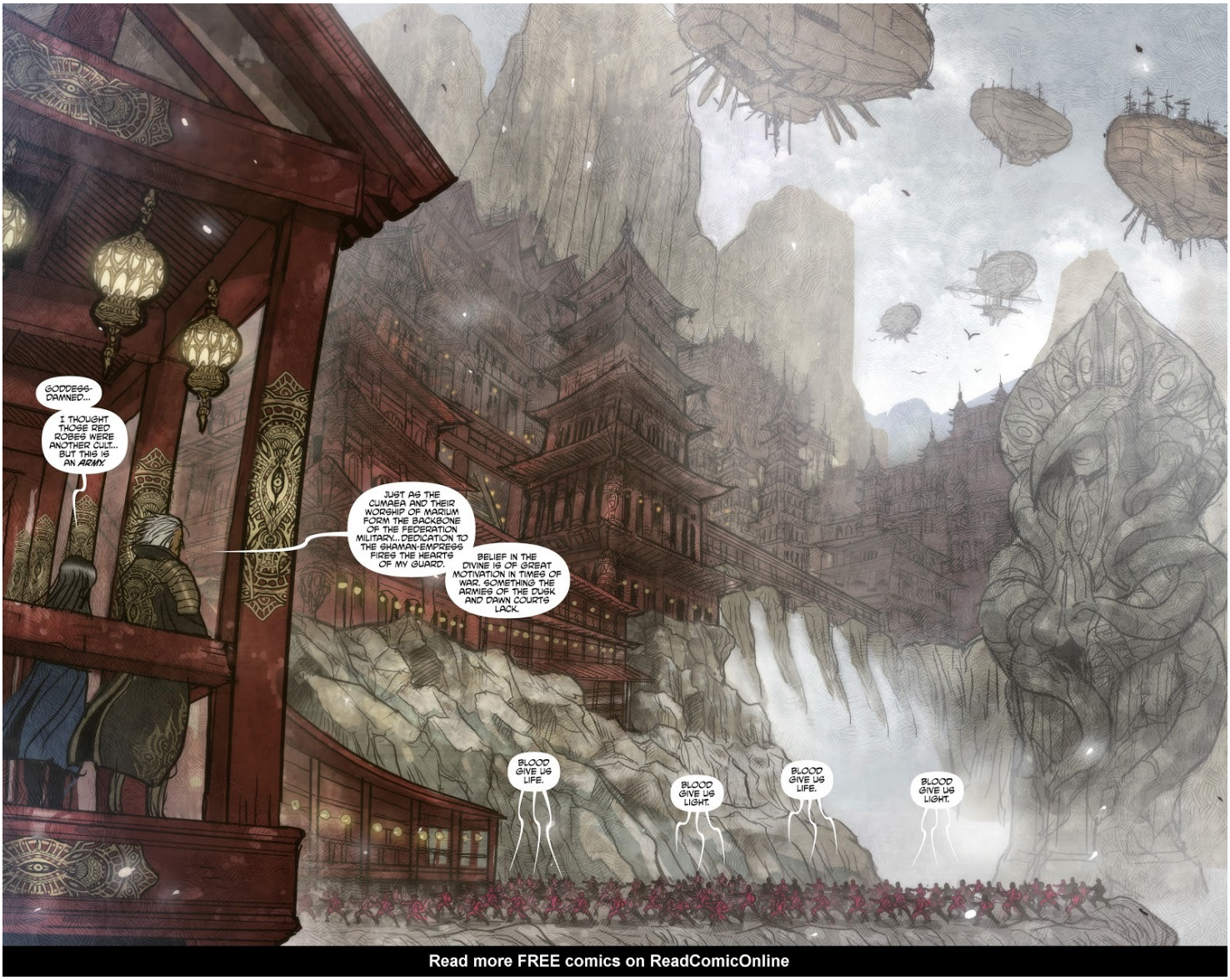

I AM NOT... YOUR DAUGHTER.
NO. YOU'LL HURT YOURSELF.
FUCK OFF, OLD MAN.
ARE YOU BLIND, DAUGHTER? WE ARE FAMILY.
THAT EYE ON YOUR CHEST DOESN'T MEAN SHIT.
IT MEANS I AM YOUR FATHER.
WE ARE BLOOD, CHILD.
YOU ARE MY BLOOD.
AND?
YOU DRUGGED ME. KIDNAPPED ME.
ALTERED MY BODY.

IF YOU ARE MY FATHER, THERE ARE BETTER WAYS TO START A CONVERSATION.
MY DEAR, IN MY LIMITED EXPERIENCE, HOW PARENTS EXERCISE POWER OVER THEIR CHILDREN IS THE ONLY CONVERSATION FAMILY EVER TRULY HAS.
YOUR MOTHER WOULD AGREE, I'M SURE. SHE WAS QUITE THE EXPERT.
SHE'S DEAD. MURDERED.
SO I HEARD. NOT THE FATE I EXPECTED FOR MORIKO HALFWOLF.
BUT NOT SURPRISING, EITHER.
YVETTE LO LIM HAD SOMETHING TO DO WITH HER DEATH. DID YOU KNOW THAT?
AND YET, SHE SEEMS TO BE YOUR GUEST. YOU EXPECT ME TO TRUST ANYTHING YOU HAVE TO SAY?
IF YOU FEEL AGGRIEVED, KILL THE WITCH.
SHE WAS USEFUL IN FINDING YOU. SHE WAS USEFUL IN OTHER WAYS. BUT NOT MORE USEFUL THAN YOUR TRUST.
YOU'LL FIND WARMER CLOTHES AND SHOES IN THE OTHER ROOM.
YOU'LL NEED THEM.
WHERE IS THE RAVEN LORD?
NOT HERE. HE FLED.
MAYBE YOU KILLED HIM.
HE ESCAPED ME, UNFORTUNATELY. HIS SHIELD SAVED HIM.

HE IS, HOWEVER, AN AGENT OF YOUR ENEMIES...
NO ONE WOULD BE THE WISER IF YOU SHOWED HIM DEATH, RATHER THAN TRUST.
YOU CAN MIND YOUR FUCKING BUSINESS.
YOU SOUND LIKE YOUR MOTHER.
I HOPE SO.
MMM... PERHAPS YOU NOTICED...
...I LAID OUT SOME MEMENTOS OF HER.
THE PHOTOGRAPHS ARE QUITE DEAR TO ME.
YOU WERE A HAPPY CHILD.
IT WAS RATHER INFECTIOUS.


I'M NOT CERTAIN I *CARED* FOR YOUR MOTHER... BUT I ADMIRED HER GREATLY.
ADMIRATION, HOWEVER, WAS NOT ENOUGH FOR ME TO DESIRE A CHILD... EVER... WITH ANYONE.
CHILDREN DO NOT JUST DRAIN THEIR MOTHERS, YOU KNOW.
THEY ALSO TAKE FROM THEIR FATHERS.
IN YOUR CASE... YOU TOOK WHAT WAS MINE.
THE POWER?
THE OLD GOD?
THE BLOOD WASN'T AWAKE IN YOU. HOW WOULD YOU KNOW WHAT YOU WERE MISSING?
WHAT MAKES YOU THINK THE BLOOD WASN'T AWAKE?
IS THAT WHAT YOU WERE TOLD?
NO, CHILD. THE OLD GOD MIGHT NOT HAVE EMERGED FROM MY FLESH, AS I'M TOLD IT HAS YOURS -- BUT I TASTED ITS DREAMS.
IT WAS AWAKE ENOUGH TO GIVE ME *STRENGTH.*
THERE ARE THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT YOURSELF.
THINGS ONLY I CAN TEACH YOU.
THAT'S THE OLDEST LIE EVER.

...AND YET... AND YET...
...ISN'T THAT RIGHT, MAIKA?
YOU'VE BEEN PLANNING THIS FOR A LONG TIME.
YOU TOOK THE FOX CHILD, DIDN'T YOU?
OF COURSE I DID.
WHERE IS SHE?
SHE'LL BE HERE TOMORROW. UNHARMED.
AND THEN YOU CAN STAY OR LEAVE WITH HER, AS YOU WISH. YOU'RE NO PRISONER IN THIS PLACE, DAUGHTER.
I GUESS WE'LL FIND OUT, WON'T WE?


GODDESS-DAMNED...
I THOUGHT THOSE RED ROBES WERE ANOTHER CULT... BUT THIS IS AN ARMY.
JUST AS THE CUMAEA AND THEIR WORSHIP OF MARIUM FORM THE BACKBONE OF THE FEDERATION MILITARY... DEDICATION TO THE SHAMAN-EMPRESS FIRES THE HEARTS OF MY GUARD.
BELIEF IN THE DIVINE IS OF GREAT MOTIVATION IN TIMES OF WAR. SOMETHING THE ARMIES OF THE DUSK AND DAWN COURTS LACK.
BLOOD GIVE US LIFE.
BLOOD GIVE US LIGHT.
BLOOD GIVE US LIFE.
BLOOD GIVE US LIGHT.

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THE SHAMAN-EMPRESS HAD POWER, BUT SHE WASN'T DIVINE. JUST SMART.
MAYBE EVERYONE ELSE IS SO STUPID THAT COUNTS FOR DIVINITY NOW.
AM I? THE WITCHES CREATED AN EMPIRE OUT OF A DEAD WOMAN.
YOU ARE ENTIRELY TOO CYNICAL, DAUGHTER.
WHAT IS THIS LITTLE ARMY TRYING TO ACCOMPLISH?
IS SURVIVAL NOT ENOUGH? A WAR IS COMING, AFTER ALL. THE WAR IS HERE.
YOU SHOULD TRY HARDER NOT TO LAUGH WHEN YOU SAY THAT.
YOUR TRAVAILS HAVE MADE YOU PERSPICACIOUS.
ALL MY *TRAVAILS* MADE ME HATE THE TASTE OF BULLSHIT. BESIDES, MY MOTHER NEVER WAS INTO THE PHILANTHROPIC TYPES.
WHOSE SIDE ARE *YOU* ON?
MINE.
AND... YOURS.

YOU AND I WERE MARKED AS TRUE DESCENDANTS.
WE CARRY THE LIFEBLOOD OF THE SHAMAN-EMPRESS. WE EMBODY ALL THE *POSSIBILITIES* OF HER RESURRECTION.
THAT IS SOMETHING I BELIEVE IN.
AND, AS THE POETS SAY, WAR CREATES... OPPORTUNITIES.
FOR WEALTH... AND POWER... AND MOST IMPORTANTLY OF ALL, CHANGE.
SO, YOU'RE LIKE THE REST OF THEM.
I CAN ASSURE YOU, DAUGHTER, THERE IS NO ONE ON THIS WORLD LIKE ME.
THE DUSK AND DAWN COURTS ARE DECAYING.
THE ANCIENTS PLOT THEIR OWN RESURRECTION, THE ARCANICS PRAY FOR THEIR SURVIVAL, AND THE CUMAEA HAVE BEEN POISONED WITH THE VERY DEMONS THEY LOATHE.
HUMANITY? OF LITTLE CONSEQUENCE.
WHEN THE COMING WAR IS FINALLY DECIDED, DOES ANYONE TRULY WANT TO BE RULED BY THESE CREPUSCULAR DOMINIONS?
I THINK NOT.
AND I SUPPOSE YOU WANT TO BE THE ONE IN CHARGE?
THE SELF-APPOINTED SHAMAN-EMPEROR?

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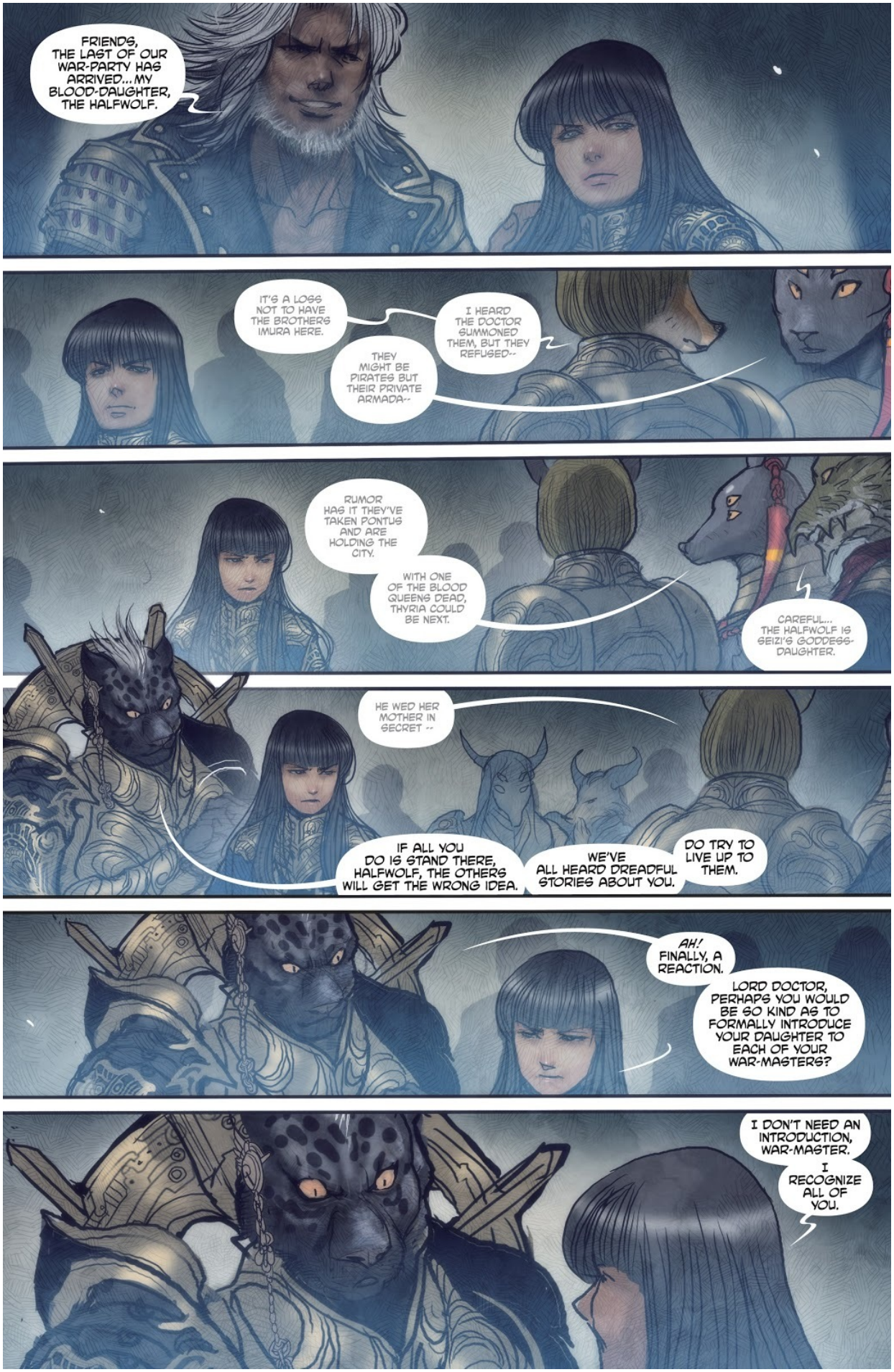
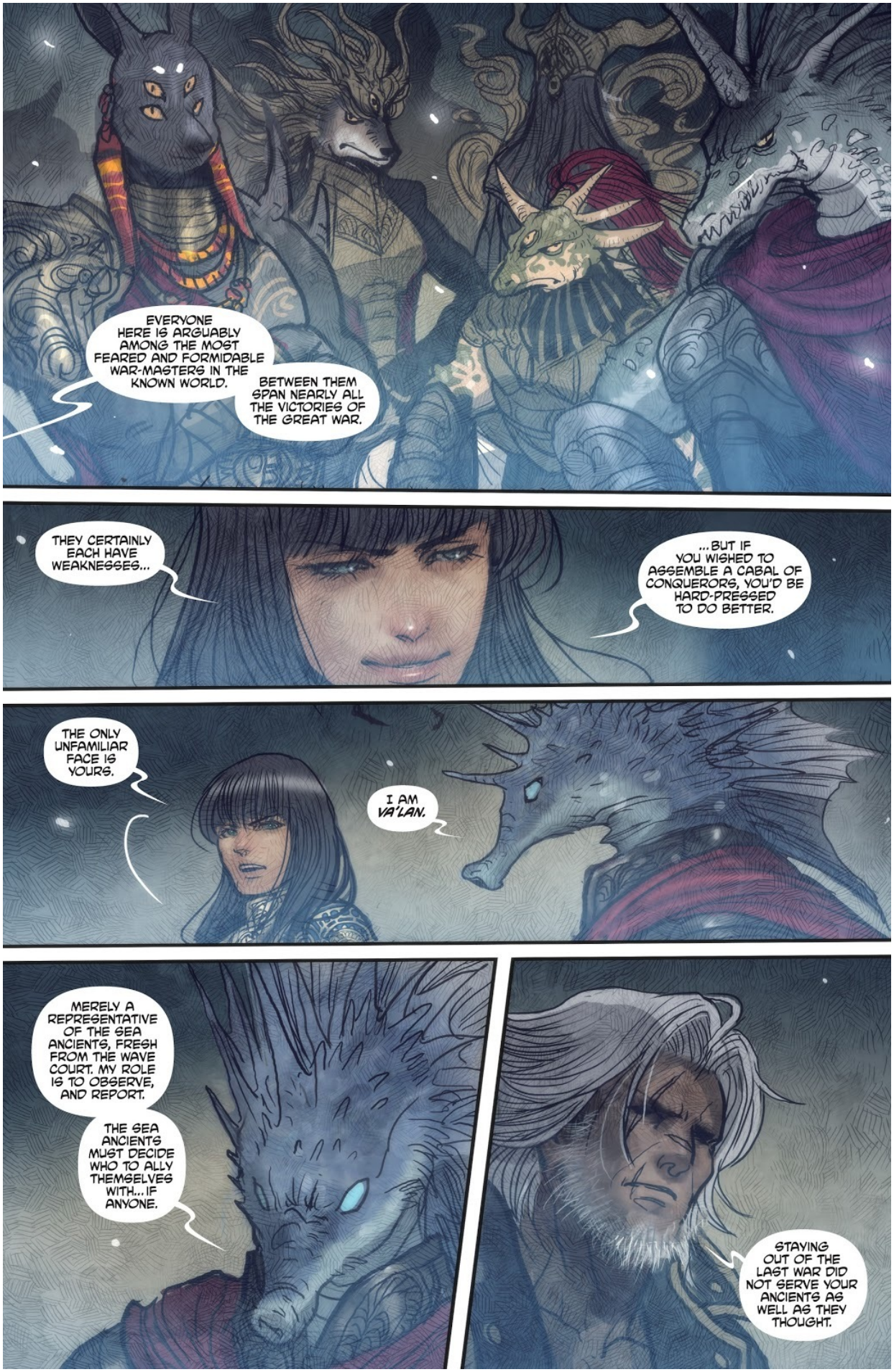
MY DEAR, I ALREADY *AM* IN CHARGE.
IT WILL JUST TAKE TIME FOR LESSER BEINGS TO GRASP THE TRUTH.


FRIENDS, THE LAST OF OUR WAR-PARTY HAS ARRIVED... MY BLOOD-DAUGHTER, THE HALFWOLF.
IT'S A LOSS NOT TO HAVE THE BROTHERS IMURA HERE.
I HEARD THE DOCTOR SUMMONED THEM, BUT THEY REFUSED--
THEY MIGHT BE PIRATES BUT THEIR PRIVATE ARMADA--
RUMOR HAS IT THEY'VE TAKEN PONTUS AND ARE HOLDING THE CITY.
WITH ONE OF THE BLOOD QUEENS DEAD, THYRIA COULD BE NEXT.
CAREFUL... THE HALFWOLF IS SEIZI'S GODDESS-DAUGHTER.
HE WED HER MOTHER IN SECRET --
IF ALL YOU DO IS STAND THERE, HALFWOLF, THE OTHERS WILL GET THE WRONG IDEA.
WE'VE ALL HEARD DREADFUL STORIES ABOUT YOU.
DO TRY TO LIVE UP TO THEM.
AH! FINALLY, A REACTION.
LORD DOCTOR, PERHAPS YOU WOULD BE SO KIND AS TO FORMALLY INTRODUCE YOUR DAUGHTER TO EACH OF YOUR WAR-MASTERS?
I DON'T NEED AN INTRODUCTION, WAR-MASTER.
I RECOGNIZE ALL OF YOU.

YOU ARE AGATA TONG NAMMA. ALSO CALLED THE DUELIST, FOR BEING UNBEATEN AT PISTOL AND BLADE.
THE GREATEST SWORDSWOMAN OF HER GENERATION, YOU AND YOUR PERSONAL GUARD SINGLE-HANDEDLY HELD OFF FEDERATION SOLDIERS AT NOTCH HALLOW WHILE YOUR SURVIVING TROOPS RETREATED.
ARCANIC GIFT: NONE.
ULIAZA GRIMM, CAPTAIN OF THE GREY LEGION.
AN ELITE UNIT THAT SERVED UNDER THE WARLORD. YOU WERE AT THE FOREFRONT OF EVERY MAJOR ENGAGEMENT IN THE GREAT WAR AND EVEN MANAGED TO ESCAPE THE DESTRUCTION OF CONSTANTINE WITH THE MAJORITY OF YOUR FORCES INTACT.
ARCANIC GIFT: POWER OF ANTICIPATION.
AND UNLESS I'M MISTAKEN... YOU'RE SENTENUS PO.
THE SO-CALLED LION OF LUKASSUS. KEEL-COMMANDER OF THE TYPHOON ARMADA. PIRATE SCOURGE AND FORMER ADMIRAL OF THE DAWN COURT. YOU COMMAND THE LARGEST INDEPENDENT SKYFLEET IN THE KNOWN WORLD.
ARCANIC GIFT: IRON SKIN.
I COULD GO ON?
OH, NO NEED.
YOU'RE A STUDY, DAUGHTER.


EVERYONE HERE IS ARGUABLY AMONG THE MOST FEARED AND FORMIDABLE WAR-MASTERS IN THE KNOWN WORLD.
BETWEEN THEM SPAN NEARLY ALL THE VICTORIES OF THE GREAT WAR.
THEY CERTAINLY EACH HAVE WEAKNESSES...
...BUT IF YOU WISHED TO ASSEMBLE A CABAL OF CONQUERORS, YOU'D BE HARD-PRESSED TO DO BETTER.
THE ONLY UNFAMILIAR FACE IS YOURS.
I AM VA'LAN.
MERELY A REPRESENTATIVE OF THE SEA ANCIENTS, FRESH FROM THE WAVE COURT. MY ROLE IS TO OBSERVE, AND REPORT.
THE SEA ANCIENTS MUST DECIDE WHO TO ALLY THEMSELVES WITH... IF ANYONE.
STAYING OUT OF THE LAST WAR DID NOT SERVE YOUR ANCIENTS AS WELL AS THEY THOUGHT.

WE ARE THE BLOOD COURT, DAUGHTER.
A FORCE OF RECKONING THE LIKES OF WHICH HAS NEVER BEEN WITNESSED.
AND NOW THAT YOU ARE HERE, WE CAN BEGIN TO FINALIZE WHO WILL BE THE FIRST TO FALL IN THE COMING WAR.
WE'RE MISSING THE BEAST, LORD DOCTOR.
SHOULDN'T WE WAIT?
I'VE DISPATCHED HER ON A MISSION VITAL TO OUR INTERESTS.
SHE KNOWS THE PLANNING WILL MOVE AHEAD. WITH HER BLESSING.
ONE OTHER WILL SOON BE JOINING US, HOWEVER.
SOMEONE YOU KNOW WELL, DAUGHTER.
MY LOYAL SERVANT...
"...THE NEKOMANCER... REN MORMORIAN."

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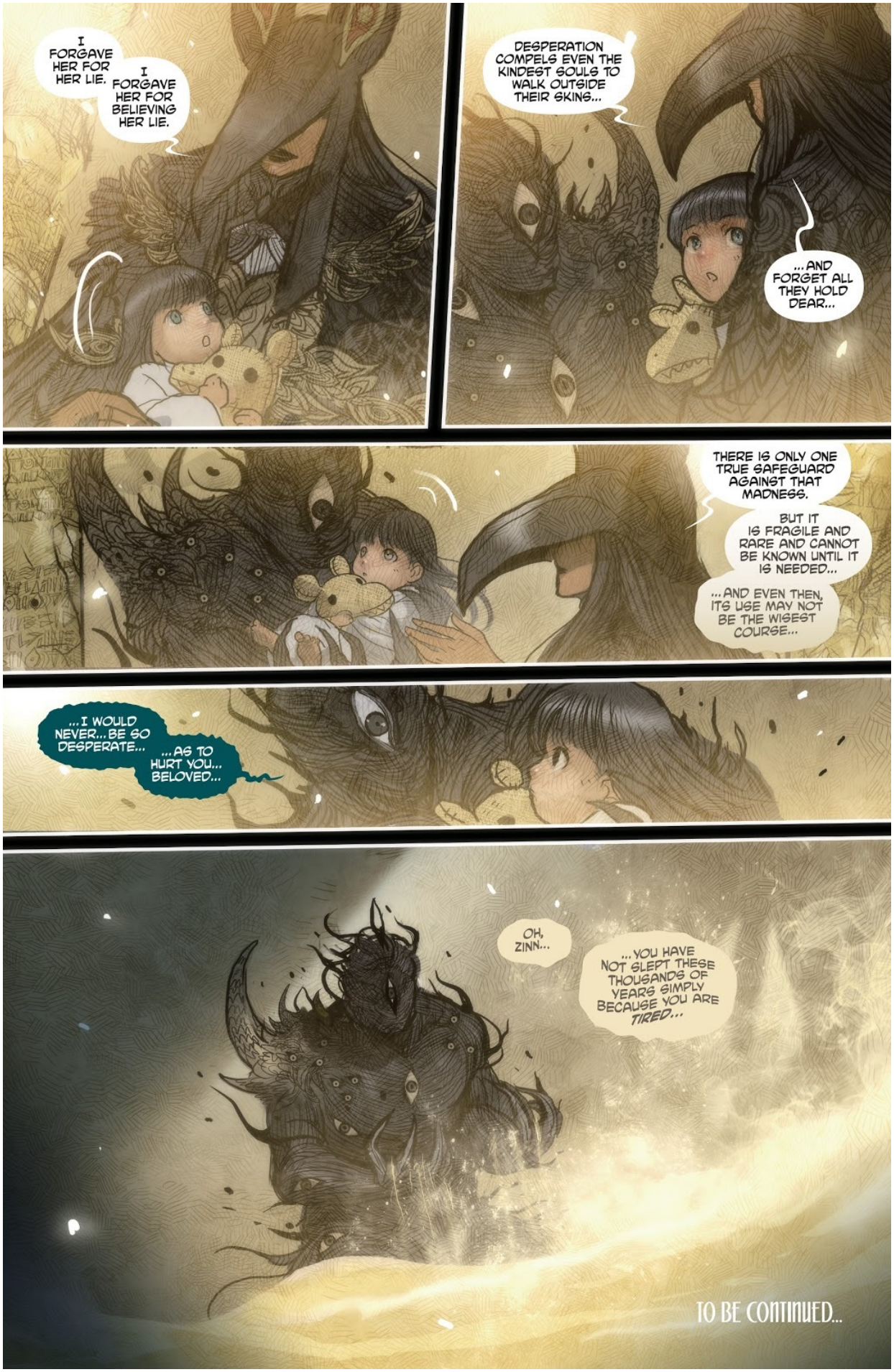
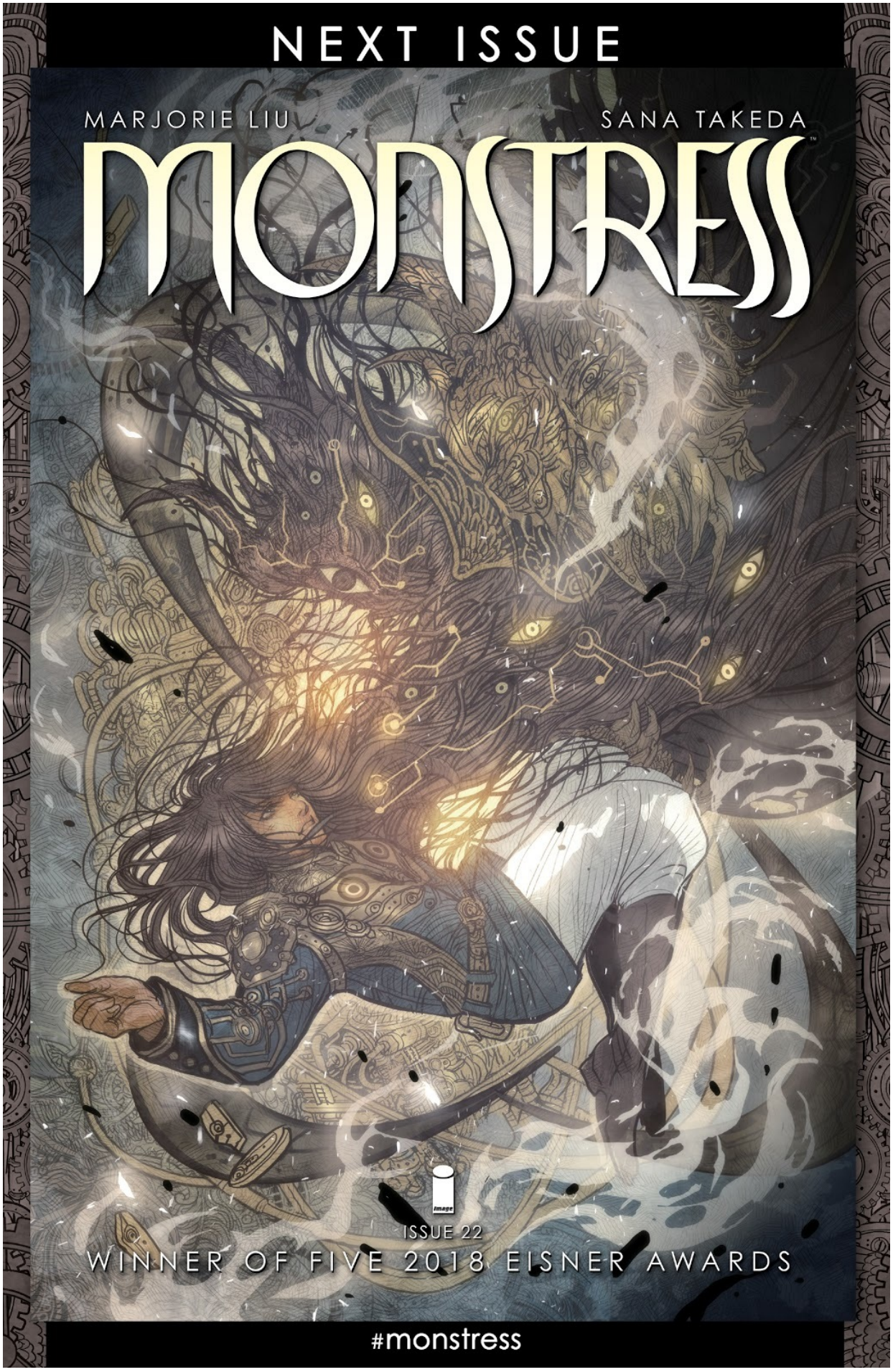
... ZZZT... FIRST DESTROYER... ZZZT... I SAW IT WITH MY OWN... ZZZT... SENSORS...
... ZZZT... IF ONLY... ZZZT... I HAD SEVERED YOU COMPLETELY... ZZZT... FROM THE SACRED VESSEL... ZZZT...
... ZZZT... REDEEM YOUR TREACHERY... ZZZT...
... ZZZT... BRING BACK... ZZZT... THE SHAMAN-EMPRESS... ZZZT...
... IT IS NONSENSE... THE SERVITOR WAS LYING...
... I HAVE COMMITTED GREAT SINS... IN MY LIFE... I HAVE BROKEN... THAT WHICH WAS SACRED...
... BUT I COULD NOT... HAVE BETRAYED... THE BELOVED...
... YOU KNOW THAT... SURELY...
WHEN I FINALLY MET MY MOTHER, SHE SAID SOMETHING SIMILAR TO ME...


I FORGAVE HER FOR HER LIE.
I FORGAVE HER FOR BELIEVING HER LIE.
DESPERATION COMPELS EVEN THE KINDEST SOULS TO WALK OUTSIDE THEIR SKINS...
...AND FORGET ALL THEY HOLD DEAR...
THERE IS ONLY ONE TRUE SAFEGUARD AGAINST THAT MADNESS.
BUT IT IS FRAGILE AND RARE AND CANNOT BE KNOWN UNTIL IT IS NEEDED...
...AND EVEN THEN, ITS USE MAY NOT BE THE WISEST COURSE...
...I WOULD NEVER... BE SO DESPERATE...
...AS TO HURT YOU... BELOVED...
OH, ZINN...
...YOU HAVE NOT SLEPT THESE THOUSANDS OF YEARS SIMPLY BECAUSE YOU ARE TIRED...
TO BE CONTINUED...

NEXT ISSUE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Archival research from the esteemed **Professor Tam Tam,** former First Record-Keeper of the Is'hami Temple, and learned contemporary of Namron Black Claw...

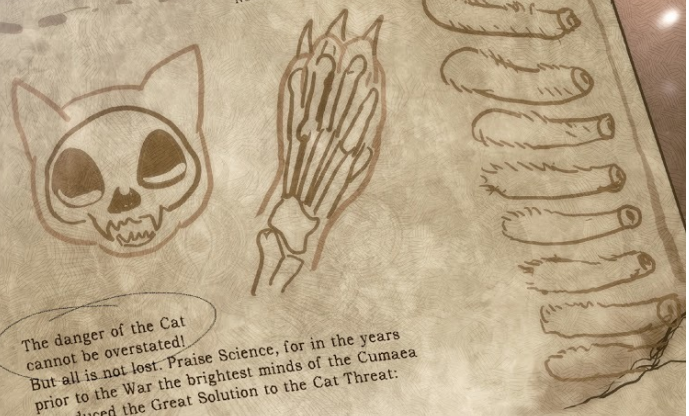
The Violation of Aurum

Death of the Holy Mother

complicated by the preposterous theory that Cats and Humans peacefully co-existed In the Dark Times before the birth of Marium. These cursed Edenites also subscribe to the outlandish belief that Human Civilization came to be only through timely interventions from Cats.

Such superstitions should never be tolerated for it obscures the central fact that the Cat is the Great Foe of Humanity. Inscrutable and remorseless, Cats are deceivers of the first order and their viciousness knows no limits. Many of our Beloved Order have lost their lives to Cats. Because of their extreme fecundity and their ability to inhabit all but the most inhospitable habitats, all attempts to exterminate the vile race has met with failure.

The Cat is dangerously seductive – beware their large eyes, which are said to hypnotize a weakened Human. Beware, too, their hidden claws -- but above all beware their Terrible Cunning. The more tails a Cat bears the more depraved it is – fear All Cats but fear most of all the Cat with Many Tails! That Cat is closest in fiendishness to the foul spirit all Cats worship -- a vile entity known as Ubasti.



The danger of the Cat cannot be overstated! But all is not lost. Praise Science, for in the years prior to the War the brightest minds of the Cumaea introduced the Great Solution to the Cat Threat: the Innoculus.

Through repeated injections of this Salvific Serum, Cats become as the Holy Marium intended: docile Animals shorn of unholy speech, superfluous tails, and the demonic compulsions that mimic Thought. It is the great misfortune of our time that Science has not yet provided the means to produce the Innoculus in the necessary quantities to gas all members of this verminous Species.

SANA'S WAR-MASTER SKETCHES

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